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ABSTRACT

Current interest in curriculum is of four types. First, there is an interest in analyzing and describing aspects of curriculum, both in terms of what actually goes on in schools and in terms of how curriculum policy is made and implemented. This field of inquiry is well established. Not so thoroughly investigated is a second area, the attempt to find more effective means to achieve desired curricular goals. While experimental studies are wanting, there is a trend toward examining teaching practice within the situational context rather than in terms of more generalized absolute standards. Third, there is the very active political face of curriculum concern. This face, seen when special causes are advanced through curriculum policy and programs, threatens to eclipse the fourth type of interest, the search for improvement in purposes and content of school programs and in the methods for achieving such developments. (Author/PGD)

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Curriculum--A Field Shaped by Different Faces

John D. McNeil

There are at least four faces to curriculum activity. The curriculum field has an instrumental face whereby its members search for more effective ways to reach predetermined curricular goals. It has a political dimension that is seen when individuals and groups try to advance their special causes by influencing curriculum policy and programs. Its disciplinary face shows in the work of scholars who regard aspects of curriculum as phenomena to be described and analyzed. The field is cast in a fourth direction by those who believe it possible to derive more appropriate purposes and content for school programs than are now recognized and that the process for doing so is also improvable.

These different orientations are reflected in the inquiry roles of curriculum specialists. As technologists they draw up reliable rules and techniques for preparing and evaluating curriculum. Principles for sequencing subject matter is an instance of curriculum technology.

As action researchers, curricularists address situation-oriented problems by drawing upon knowledge from many fields--a synoptic activity--and applying this knowledge to particular circumstances. By way of illustration, when confronted with the need to design a curriculum for a newly integrated school, the specialist forms a general view of the problem using concepts from many disciplines, such as anthropology (culture), social psychology (peer group influences), psychology (human needs), and sociology (social class).

As synthesizers, curriculum researchers pull together many findings of basic studies about some aspect of curriculum. A recent article summarizing ideas about how to structure curriculum comes to mind (Posner, 1974).

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As scholars in a discipline, some specialists analyze curriculum and the curriculum field from the point of view of a discipline such as history, economics, or philosophy. A sociological analysis showing the latent values found in school textbooks is an example. Some curriculum specialists also work at conceptualizing the curriculum field--laying out its major questions, stipulating how the questions should be tied together, and suggesting methodology for conducting curriculum inquiry.

Yesterday's Criticisms

About ten years ago the curriculum field was faulted for failing to make an impact upon the real world of the classroom. Not only had academic subject matter experts ignored curriculum specialists in providing the schools with new content, but it looked as if evaluators and product developers would be determining curriculum ends and means in the future.

Also, competing agencies and groups, each with a different notion about what schools should do, threatened to turn curriculum making into a political process with little consideration of the field's old questions about knowledge, knowing, and the learner. School programs initiated with Federal monies or developed in order to comply with court decisions substituted social cause for curriculum inquiry. Curriculum developed in response to Federal legislation under Title I, for example, was motivated more in the interests of redistributing funds to the poor than in helping children with the greatest educational needs. An accurate observer has pointed out that social action programs with their political origins are part of an effort to change not only the balance of power within American education, but also the relative status of economic and racial groups within the society (Cohen, 1970).

Friendly critics, concerned about the viability of the field, recommended that curricular specialists modify their work--to study the realities of schooling, to know what goes on in the classrooms and with what effect, to create better structures and procedures for deliberating upon curriculum proposals, and to have some contact with actual curriculum decisions. For example, Schwab (1969) recommended that specialists study the effect of training students did and did not get, that they improve curriculum deliberation by taking into account a wider variety of alternatives; that they modify theories of knowledge, learning, personality, and the like, in the light of discrepancies found in the individual case. Popham (1971) suggested that curriculists evolve and sharpen needs assessment techniques as a curriculum technology that would get wide acceptance.

Responses to the Criticisms and Recommendations

Although one cannot say that the criticisms and recommendations were the cause, much subsequent activity was in accord with the recommendations given. There was no protest to the gloomy assessment of the field. Studies were undertaken to reveal realities of schooling, curriculum making, and implementation. To a large extent the methodology and findings from these studies--such as answers to what happens in classrooms, why particular curriculum is adopted but not implemented, and whose meanings are promoted through curriculum--are indicators of the field's current method and substance. The following is an account of curricular inquiry in school settings and in policy making and implementation:

1. Studying the Curriculum in School Settings

Three paths have been taken to learn what goes on in classrooms and with what effect. These paths are observations in classrooms, high-low studies which attempt to isolate school factions capable of effecting achievement apart from environmental and background factors, and longitudinal studies aimed at finding out how schooling contributes to the quality of life.

Observations in Classrooms

Goodlad and associates began direct observations of classrooms with a study of 158 classrooms in 67 elementary schools, throwing light on the discrepency between curricular intent and practice (Goodlad, 1970). Their current study of both elementary and secondary schools is of interest for its methodology (Goodlad, 1977). The investigators are not using any theory of schooling because they know of none that is adequate; they are not testing any hypotheses, but hope to generate some; and they are aligning a number of different interests--Federal education agencies and researchers who seek useful data about representative schools, foundation executives who see implications in the study for their own involvement in school improvement programs, and school personnel who hope the information about their own school will be more useful than test scores for deciding where and how to effect change.

In contrast, others are doing classroom research in order to confirm their expectations. For instance, Apple (1977) has reconceptualized the problem of what is taught in schools to a study in ideology. The problem is no longer viewed as a question of what shall be construed as knowledge nor as a simple technical matter of how to organize knowledge so that students can acquire it, nor as a purely psychological problem of

how to get students to learn it. Rather, to him, it is a question of what is considered legitimate knowledge by specific social groups and classes in specific schools at particular moments. He is interested in whose meanings are collected and distributed through both the overt and hidden curriculum in schools. To reveal the meanings that children are acquiring from the curriculum, Apple thinks it is necessary to study the use of materials, spontaneous remarks, and other aspects of daily classroom life in actual classroom settings.

The cumulative findings from the studies of elementary school classrooms indicate that there is little of the much touted curriculum prescribed by the academicians of the prior decade; textbooks predominate as the medium of instruction; the inquiry approach to learning is seldom evident; much time is spent in control, classroom routine, and busy work; the language arts and arithmetic dominate the subjects taught; children are relatively powerless to influence the flow of daily events and obedience is more highly valued than ingenuity.

High-Low Studies

High-low studies are the latest answer to the curriculum specialist's concern about how to relate curriculum variables to school achievement. Accordingly, pairs of schools are selected so that one member of the pair is a school whose pupils are higher on standardized tests than predicted on the basis of the pupils' characteristics. The other member of the pair is a school whose scores are far lower than predicted. Subsequent questioning of teachers, administrators, pupils, as well as observation of classroom practice, is undertaken to determine how these schools differ in their approach to schooling.

The California School Effectiveness Study is an instance of a high-low study (California State Department, 1977). Findings from this undertaking indicate that, in contrast to lower achieving schools, in the higher achieving schools principals have more influence over decisions affecting curriculum development; pupils are divided into fewer groups and have more opportunities to decide for themselves about varying their tasks; teachers use fewer variations in materials and are more satisfied with available resources; and there is less curricular change over a five year period.

Longitudinal Studies

Closely related to the need for knowing what schools are doing and with what effect are efforts to study the consequences of training students did and did not get. Flannagan's study of education's contribution to the quality of life is a good examplar (Flanagan, 1975). This longitudinal study, which was based on a sample of students who were 15 years old when tested by Project Talent in 1960, reveals areas where education is both making a contribution and failing to satisfy youth's needs. Former students reported that they had used the information and skills obtained in high schools in many ways--in their occupational roles and in everyday life. Although most were satisfied with many dimensions of quality in their lives, such as having a job, friendships, maturity, and personal understanding, many were not satisfied with the extent to which they were using their minds through learning, attending school, and acquiring additional knowledge. Also, nearly half of the respondents were dissatisfied with respect to their creative experiences and participation in local or national government.

2. Curriculum Policy Making and Implementation Methodology

Current methodology for arriving at curriculum policy calls for debate over curriculum issues, obtaining a wide range of recommendations, constructing a limited number of options, and then projecting the requirements and possible consequences of each policy option. An illustration of this methodology is found in a report depicting how the National Institute of Education established a policy for its own role in curriculum (Schaffavzick & Sykes, 1977). After a year and a half of preparatory activities which included reviewing relevant literature, discussions with members of lay and professional organizations, commissioning of papers by scholars, practitioners, experienced curriclum developers, and policy analysts, a NIE task force was able to document policy relevant findings defining the key issues: The divergence of opinions over the quality of the school curriculum, the efficiency of Federal curriculum activity, the capabilities of publishers to produce high quality materials that will serve the needs of diverse populations, teachers' competencies in curriculum development, and the effect of parent involvement in curriculum making.

On the basis of the analysis made by the task force, the Executive Committee concluded that NIE should only try to improve instructional programs and materials by sponsoring (a) the conduct, synthesis, and dissemination of relevant research, (b) an effort to strengthen and coordinate the work of others in improving curriculum, and (c) the prototypic development of new programs and materials. Full-scale development may be considered by NIE, but only for certain limited purposes (equalization of educational opportunities, national needs that others cannot meet, and unique opportunities for curriculum improvement).

Participation in Curriculum Making

It is clear that in contrast with earlier periods, recent curriculum studies are less focused on how a curriculum should be constructed or developed and more upon explaining the determinants of the curriculum. There is an overriding interest on the part of a wide array of individuals and groups to be involved at all levels of curriculum making.

In order to answer the question of who makes curriculum, definitions are needed. Goodlad has provided five distinct perceptions of "The" curriculum, each of which may imply different curriculum makers (Goodlad, 1977): The ideal--what some planning group has proposed as desirable; the formal--what some controlling agency has prescribed; the perceived--teachers' perceptions of what they are doing in the light of their learners' needs; the operational--what is observed as going on in classrooms; and the experiential--what students perceive they are being offered and to which they relate.

Empirical studies indicate that both teachers and lay persons have increased their participation in ideal and formal curriculum making (Schaffarzick, 1976). However, the roles they play are not central. The curriculum proposals of teachers are typically small in scale, and their own program improvement activities are often delineated by administrators' and board members' earlier decisions. Lay persons do not participate as much in curriculum change considerations as do teachers, but their role in initiating, debating, and advising on change has increased in some places. Their participation is often superficial. They take part very early, when general goals are being established, or very late, when most of the preparation for change has been completed.

On the other hand, those making the ideal and formal curriculum have little control of the perceived, operational, and experiential curriculum. Indeed, they seldom even try to stipulate the materials, methods, or techniques to be used. These uncertainties are stabilized by rendering them invisible--assigned to the trusted care of the teacher who operates behind closed doors.

Reasons for the Failure to Implement Curriculum Policy

Explanations for the failure of policy makers outside the local school to control school practice are increasing. Wise (1977) believes there is a limit to the school's capacity to absorb new procedures without a fundamental redesign, and that the cummulative effect of changes pressured from outside the school is unmanageable. Meyer's research on school organization supports the view that educational policies fail because they are presumed on the idea that the curriculum can be improved by rational management procedures (Meyer, 1977). Although he is not a curriculum specialist, Meyer provides the kind of knowledge specialists must have if they are to make policy and change concerns of the field. Meyer states that it is not achievement that determines the survival of the school, but satisfaction in expectations. Accreditation rather than results keeps the school in business. If teachers, parents, students, and community members are not satisfied that the school's program conforms to their definition of what education should be, then the school is in trouble, regardless of its success in effecting pupil achievement or socialization. Instead of viewing schools as deficient because they fail to manage instruction efficiently, Meyer shows the strength of schools in gaining support. Judged on the basis of survival, financial support, and constituent satisfaction, the technically decoupled

school (the curriculum is given definition at district and state levels, but is rather homogeneous across the country and with little inspection to see what is actually taught or learned) is a stable and successful organization form.

Curriculum specialists who value efficiency and accountability, who want to make the instructional core of the school more public, may fail because accountability procedures are perceived as costly in terms or coordination, unpredictability, conflict, revealed failure, and consequential loss of legitimacy.

The popularity of studies of curriculum change may be due to frustrations in ability to control. Policy at national, state, and school district levels seems, at best, to promote adoption, not implementation. Definite answers about how to effect change are hard to come by because of variations in the nature of the changes, the subject matter included, the social climate, and the unique personalities of the local participants.

Curriculum synthesizers, Fullan and Pomfret (1977), have summarized studies regarding curriculum implementation. They point out the importance of asking whether or not a proposed change represents a change in material, organization, role, knowledge, or value. They also identify factors that affect implementation, such as complexity of the innovation, provision for inservice training, organizational climate, and political complexity.

Today's Appraisal of the Field

As indicated previously, there has been a response to the plea that specialists attend to the existential character of curriculum. We can expect more studies to show why certain curriculum demands--career

education, multicultural curriculum, competency-based curriculum--dominate as the formal curriculum at certain times and how these demands do or do not become legitimized in the local school. Studies like those of Meyer are needed to show how schools deal with the curriculum cacophony brought by the varied voices of advisory groups, state and local school boards, state legislatures, federal agencies, and the like. A case in point is the confusion in California over how to develop a bilingual curriculum when Federal policy calls for early transition from instruction in a non-English language and California state policy advocates maintenance of the non-English language.

Some progress has been made in creating structure and procedures for deliberating curriculum proposals. The community school council using the techniques of need assessment is an instance. However, the deliberations often lack quality. Usually there is little more than an expression of preferences regarding a number of curriculum goals. Data to use in justifying the selection of particular goals are wanting. Decision makers at all levels fail to relate curriculum proposals to the realities of schooling--the interface with the existing curriculum, the effect upon community support of the school, and specialized staff training requirements.

Need for Focus in the Curriculum Field

A backlash is now occurring because of the ready response to criticisms of 10 years ago. Those in the field are now faulted for failing to attend to their historic task of studying aspects of culture that have potential for educational content and determining how this content can best be made available to students. Perhaps this task was slighted by curriculum specialists because academicians were so aggressive in

defining content in a prior decade. Academicians now have, however, largely abandoned this work.

Heubner (1977) has another explanation. He believes that those in the field erred in concerning themselves with such matters as curriculum change (a responsibility of school administrators) and the advocacy of social causes (better handled through political movements). Unlike Heubner, Westbury (1976) would have those in the field concern themselves less with higher things like goals and knowledge of most worth, and instead focus upon the task of learning how to deliver what the public wants from the school right now. As an illustrative strategy, he suggests that the curriculum specialists use tests as proxies for goals and plunge into an analysis of test results to reveal why achievement is and is not obtained--similar to the orientation of those conducting high-low studies. He believes that opportunity to learn and time in instruction may prove to be the key variables in our ability to design the means to achieve minimal ends.

The Failure to Apply Curriculum Technology

In contrast with the 1960s, few are inquiring about how best to organize curriculum. There is little sequencing, correlating, or interpreting of subject matter. Indeed, in looking at what is offered teachers by such professional magazines as Learning, one finds mostly unrelated, "one shot" activities--"playful exercises," "learning centers," "games," and "hundreds of fresh appealing topics." In her examination of commercial instructional materials, Quellmalz (1977) found, among other technological deficiencies, the failure to consistently employ principles of sequence.

The problem seems to be how to get application of the knowledge we already have regarding curriculum technology. We need applications of old organizing rules like those prescribing a common element--value, skill, generalization, principle, or concept--among activities and courses so that learning has a cumulative effect. The judicious selection of organizing elements would guard against the danger of teaching only to topics. If the rule prescribing organizing elements had been applied in developing the personally relevant courses, modules, and learning packets in the high schools, and in planning elective and experimental courses in colleges, we might not now have so many negative reactions to these innovations. Worry about the absence of common outlooks and mastery of fundamentals indicates that appealing topics were taught as ends in themselves rather than as vehicles through which more educationally powerful content could have been delivered. Hence, an equally unproductive response is occurring--cutting back offerings to a limited number of traditional courses unrelated to learner concern or interest.

Conditions Favoring Action Research

Several forces are at work to make possible an increase in activity associated with action research. Loss of faith in the verities of learning principles and in the predictive power of theoretical curriculum models is one. Schwab's early suggestion that curriculum specialists modify theories in the light of discrepencies in the individual case is echoed everywhere. Learning principles like those advocating feedback, appropriate practice, and reward, are now being dethroned as indicators of good practice. Instead, we are told to appraise these principles in given settings and to observe their effects in context. Explanation of what happens is not to be confined to original propositions but include considerations of the conditions, persons, and events present.

Similarly, there is greater recognition of the limitations of theoretical curriculum models. Peters (1977), for example, in his review of studies indicating the effects from widely used curriculum models in early childhood education, notes how the dimensions of classroom behavior that most sharply discriminate between the models are not always the ones which relate to learning and development.

Growing uneasiness about the ability of anyone at a distance from the classroom--publishers or product developers--to design a curriculum and and have it implemented as intended is another factor likely to bear upon action research involving teachers. The systematic testing of a proposed curriculum by teachers may lead to their acceptance of it. Resources for development of programs in action research are, however, limited at present.

Interest in a Personally Meaningful Curriculum

One promising line of curriculum inquiry comes from those curriculum specialists who are interested in learners having a more personally meaningful curriculum. Instead of looking outward to social structures to give meaning, they are more sensitive to how students can make their own. These specialists are interested in the individual's experience--awareness of it, feeling about it, and the perceived meaning it holds. In reexamining curriculum in the classroom in a new way, Tyler (1978), for example, is getting at the experiential curriculum of learners themselves. Her method includes (a) eliciting student perceptions (vivid memories and reactions) to curricular aspects--tests books, assignments, groupings, etc., and (b) interpreting the learners' responses so that practice can be modified accordingly. By way of illustration, a pupil's perception of tests might be noted in such a response as "Teachers

control you with tests." Tyler uses psychoanalytic theory to interpret the responses--e.g., fear of loss of autonomy--and thereby modifies the practice in such ways as involving the pupil in selecting the purposes for tests, the data to be gathered, the kinds of analyses to make, and the use of the test results. Inquiry toward a personally meaningful curriculum is self-corrective and may remedy some of the deficiencies revealed by descriptive studies of classrooms.

Conclusions

The four faces of curriculum are not in balance. The disciplinary face is in a good state. Progress has been made in disciplined inquiry revealing what curriculum is, how it gets to be the way it is, how it affects those who participate, and whose meanings are promoted through it. However, at issue is the question of whether or not the newer interests in the study of curriculum policy making and change are detracting efforts from the traditional tasks of content selection and organization.

There are signs that the instrumental face aimed at finding more effective means to desired ends will continue to get attention through situation-oriented inquiry using classroom observation and interview coupled with analysis of larger contextual variables. Experimental studies are wanting. There is little manipulation of variables to produce an effect and to establish cause. In contrast with 10 years ago, few specialists conduct small manageable process-product investigations, and it is recommended that such studies be placed within institutional and societal frameworks.

The political face of curriculum activity in behalf of dominant political forces is most alive, and even threatens to erase curriculum's fourth face. As with other fields that deal with society, the curriculum

field has not fulfilled its promise. The best of curriculum technology has not been implemented. There is a real possibility that in pursuing inquiry into how best to advance given goal areas and the social causes to which they point--special education, multicultural education, career education, basic competency education--curriculum specialists will close off their ability to generate fresh options and more defensible goals. The field suffers from the belief that there can be no objectivity in selecting and interpreting data from which educational purpose can be derived.

Just as some artists, like Julio Cortazar the Argentine novelist, have been able to separate their political beliefs and causes from their art--Cortazar does not allow his political activity to influence his writing--so, too, some curriculum specialists at all levels must not be instruments in behalf of special interests or national policy, but instead maintain credibility as curriculum inquirers, systematically studying a range of meanings that have implications for what should be taught and subsequently presenting new goals for consideration.

Reference Note

1. An account of curriculum roles and the kinds of knowledge produced appears in Edmund G. Short's "Knowledge Production and Utilization," in "Curriculum: A Special Case of the General Phenomenon." Review of Educational Research, Summer 1973, 43 (3), 237-301.

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